

Ad Hoc Historical Museum Study Committee Minutes of August 18, 2014

Attending: members Gaye Carpenter, Linda Christen, Angelo Colao, Kara Kerwin, Selectman William Moonan, Christopher Weisz, and Francis Gicca, Bedford Historical Society representative. Absent: Selectman Mike Rosenberg.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM in the first floor conference room of the Town Hall. The first item on the agenda was a tour of two Town buildings and an outside viewing of some privately owned structures. The committee left as a group to begin the tour.

Fay Russo had kindly agreed to meet the committee at Old Town Hall and at Town Center in order to provide access to various spaces within the buildings. Old Town hall was the first stop. Inspections were made of all three floors, which included space occupied by the Bedford Center for the Arts and Bedford Television. The Great Room, on the third floor, was also visited.

On the walk to Town Center, the house belonging to George Swallow was viewed from the exterior, as was the building at 10-12 Maple Street and the house owned by Richard Dougherty. All of these buildings could either be purchased or donated to the Town for use as museum space.

Within Town Center, space that is currently used by occasional renters or by the COA was viewed. An elevator trip to the third floor was included. This revealed an area occupied by storage cages and air handling equipment. The possibility of relocating the ducting was discussed.

Returning to the conference room, discussion turned to what criteria should be used to help come to a conclusion about which spaces would be best for an historical museum. Mr. Moonan passed around a Globe column dated 8.17.14 about house museums – in order to survive they need creative programming. The author recounted her work at a house museum in the mid-west where they held writing workshops and awards, etc. Angie Colao thought that important items to be considered should be the amount of foot-traffic naturally occurring in a potential site's area as well as space for the storage of artifacts and meeting space.

Frank Gicca passed out a picture of the Clara Sexton House, the Billerica Historical Society museum which included its operating schedule: open once a month from 1:00-3:00pm. Short hours of operation are a sad reality for many volunteer run museums. He noted how seldom it was available to the public. He also described a museum known to him in Center Harbor, New Hampshire. He said the static displays were collecting dust, and nobody came. Membership was only \$10.00 per year, but it was hard to get members, let alone visitors. He felt it would be hard for the Bedford Historical Society (BHS) to provide volunteers to keep a museum open to the public on a regular basis, and therefore, favored a building that was constantly open to the public and manned on a daily basis. The Bedford Library, he felt, was an example of such a building. The two examples described by Mr. Gicca were presented as evidence that museums that are not regularly available to the public are museums that wouldn't be financially or instructively successful.

Ms. Kerwin sees our project as more of a cultural center to relay the story of Bedford now as well as in the Colonial era available to many town groups. It would be an umbrella of sorts,

bringing things together more – many parents talk about wanting more of Bedford's programming to be closer together.

Mr. Weisz conveyed the importance of other Bedford history – mentioned the MOMA "Art of The motorcycle" exhibit which was extremely well received despite motorcycles not being obviously art. Creative programming and exhibits will bring people in to the museum. He also conveyed the importance of providing services people might be interested in. For example: research on people's houses and the history of their lots. The Historical Society has this information; providing easier access could be a good draw. There are benefits to a modern space as opposed to an historic house or building. For instance some people don't like old things, such as the smell of an old building and would prefer modern space. Old Town Hall is a beautiful space – The Great room could be rented for functions, but new construction at the library would provide a lot of traffic.

At this point, Mr. Moonan asked that the discussion be limited, for the time being, to the physical attributes and location of any building. The concern is that too much discussion now of how a museum would be staffed or designed will stifle our search process. He is resistant to automatically eliminating something because it's on North Rd., for instance. Our preconceived notions will end up narrowing our scope, to the potential detriment of the project. For instance the third floor of Town Center has challenges, but it is not our place to discount it based on that concern.

Mr. Giccia reiterated the need for the museum to be multipurpose in its design and operation.

Mr. Weisz suggested finding space that would include commercial space which would provide income to help defray costs. He explained that many volunteer spaces which run successfully have a profit operation. For instance a three story building may have shops or a restaurant on the first floor and museum space on the second and third floors.

It was decided that suggested sites should be ranked in two lists; one for new space and one for existing space. Mr. Moonan will compile the space lists and send them out in an excel file. Our homework is to drive around town and really look at the sites. Go to the library and see what Mr. Giccia has talked about there, walk around Depot Park on the weekend, etc. We should each rank the sites on the excel file and return to Mr. Moonan. He will compile the data so that we can narrow down the list.

Mr. Giccia added that he felt BHS resources should be used to maintain the content of the museum and not to operate it. He believes the BHS' finances are relatively limited. Mr. Moonan pointed out that any agreement between the Town and the BHS concerning operations and capital expenditures would result from a future negotiation between the two. In any case, the BHS will need to create a business plan that reflects the realities of the particular site that is chosen. Mr. Weisz reminded the committee that if we try to solve too big a picture all at once, we will drown in the process.

The minutes were amended and Mr. Colao moved they be accepted. Ms. Carpenter seconded the motion which was passed 6 – 0.

The next meeting was set for 7:30, Monday September 15, 2014.

Ms. Christen said she was looking at a list of museums in the state and would create a more specific list of towns of similar demographics (populations of 10,000 to 25,000) that have

museums (but not “house museums”) to bring back to the committee to use for comparative purposes. She believes the list might not exceed 25 towns that meet these criteria.

Mr. Weisz moved for adjournment and Ms. Christen seconded the motion. The motion passed 6 – 0. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 PM.

Submitted by:
William Moonan.